

Tommy Jefferson's Declaration

By Art Buchwald

As part of the Bicentennial celebration Mr. Buchwald has given us permission to use one of the pieces he wrote when he was covering television for the Colonial Broadcasting Network in 1775.

Have you ever wondered what would have happened if the people who are in charge of television today were passing on the draft of the Declaration of Independence?

The scene is Philadelphia at WJULY-TV. Several men are sitting around holding copies of the Declaration.

Thomas Jefferson comes in nervously.

"Tommy," says the producer, "It's just great. I would say it was a masterpiece."

"We love it, Tommy boy," The advertising agency man says. "It sings. Lots of drama, and it holds your in-

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terest. There are a few things that have to be changed, but otherwise it stays intact."

"What wrong with it?" Mr. Jefferson asks.

There's a pause. Everyone looks at the man from the network.

"Well, frankly, Tommy, it smacks of being a little anti-British. I mean, we've got quite a few Tory listeners,

and something like the might bring in a lot of mail."

"Now don't get sore, Tommy boy," the agency man says. "You're the best Declaration of Independence writer in the business. That's why we hired you. But our sponsor, the Boston Tea Co., is interested in selling tea, not independence. Mr. Cornwallis, the sponsor's representative, is here, and I think he has a few thoughts on the matter. Go ahead, Corney. Let's hear what you think."

Mr. Cornwallis stands up. "Mr. Jefferson, all of us in this room want this to be a whale of a document. I think we'll agree on that."

Everyone in the room nods his head.

"At the same time we feel—I think

: Not for All the Tea in Boston

I can speak for everybody—that we don't want to go over the heads of the mass of people who we hope will buy our product. You use words like despotism, annihilation, migration and tenure. Those are all egghead words and don't mean a damn thing to the public. Now I like your stuff about 'Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.' They all tie in great with tea, particularly pursuit of happiness, but it's the feeling of all of us that you're really getting into controversial water when you start attacking the king of England."

Mr. Jefferson says, "but every word of it is true. I've got the documentary proof."

"Let me take a crack at it, Corney," the agency man says. "Look, Tommy

boy, it isn't a question of whether it's true or not. All of us here know what a louse George III can be. But if you remind people of all those taxes George has laid on us, they're not going to go out and buy tea. They're not going to go out and buy anything."

Mr. Jefferson says, "gentlemen, I was told to write a Declaration of Independence. I discussed it with many people before I did the actual writing. I've worked hard on this Declaration—harder than I've worked on anything in my life. You either take it or leave it as it is."

"We're sorry you feel that way about it, Tommy," the agency man says. "We have a responsibility to the country, but we have a bigger responsibility to the sponsor. He's

paying for it. We're not in the business of offending people, British people or any other ethnic group. It's that so, Mr. Cornwallis?"

"Check — unless. Mr. Jefferson changes it the way we want him to."

Mr. Jefferson grabs the Declaration and says, "not for all the tea in Boston," and exits.

The producer shakes his head. "I don't know, fellows. Maybe we've made a mistake. We could at least have run it up a flagpole to see who saluted."

"As far as I'm concerned," Mr. Cornwallis said, "the subject is closed. Let's talk about a western series on the French and Indian War."

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